First Congregational Parish Unitarian of Petersham, Inc.

On the Common Since 1738

Parish News – Summer 2026

Rev. Julie-Ann to Continue



Reverend Julie-Ann Silberman-Bunn agreed to continue serving our parish for another year. Her contract was approved at a congregational meeting on April 12. Rev. Julie-Ann will lead services twice each month from September to June and provide pastoral care year 'round. In addition, she will develop an adult education program in consultation with the Parish Committee and assist other committees.

Rev. Julie-Ann will launch the fall season with Water Communion Sunday, September 13.

Sexton On Board

Congratulations to our new sexton, Lisa Ahlstrom! She has gotten off to a very productive start in cleaning and maintaining our historic building. The kitchen has been thoroughly cleaned and organized and necessary repairs have been made. She cleaned out the elevator hallway that had become a storage unit, making access easier and safer and definitely more welcoming. Lisa also trimmed the too-vigorous vegetation next to our buildings. In addition, she has been monitoring water seepage inside and outside of the building and has taken steps toward remedying this ongoing problem while the parish determines a permanent fix.





Bake Sale update from 8/2/26

We appreciate the Petersham Brass Band for giving us a table at their concert to help raise funds for our church. We raised $244! This is apparently double what we raised last year. This would not have been possible without the generous support of our bakers. Thank you to each one of you who contributed. Everything smelled delicious and we had some repeat customers during the evening so they clearly enjoyed what they were eating!

The most exciting part of the evening, aside from the Petersham Brass Band, was a near brawl over the last quart of Buell Family Farm blackberries. It was resolved peacefully!

Special thanks to Kay, Pam, Lisa, Deb, and Tim who stayed to help out throughout the concert. It was an enjoyable evening on the Petersham Common.



Next up in the fundraising department will be our annual pledge drive beginning in October.

Ongoing and Coming Events

Sundays August 9, 16 & 23rd 10:30-11:00 our sanctuary will continue to be open. This is an opportunity for quiet reflection. You may come for the full half hour or less. The door is open.

Sunday, August 30 at 4:30 PM Loyall and other members of the church will host the second vesper service of the summer. Please join us for this special event.

August 17 at 1:00 - Parish Committee Meeting.

Sunday, September 13 at 10:30 will kick off our church calendar year. Our minister, Julie-Ann Silberman-Bunn will officiate and there will be special music. This service is called Water Communion. Please bring a source of water that holds meaning for you from your summer adventures.

Vesper Service Success

Our first summer vesper service on July 12 in the Memorial Garden was well-attended. Special thanks to Loyall Allen for organizing it and to Loyall and Jim Green for providing the music. Next vesper service will be August 30 at 4:30 in the Memorial Garden.

Of Stone, Wood, and Love

Step by step, we are strengthening the sinews of our historic structures. Our first completed project this year is a new sound system. New microphones, including two that are wireless, a restored amplifier, and new speakers positioned to project sound throughout the sanctuary now enable us to hear every word and note. Thanks to Loyall Allen for leading this project.

Pam and Loyall Allen worked with Pam Chevalier to upgrade our Wayside Pulpit with hook-and-loop fasteners on each of the letters. The hook-and-loop fasteners keep the letters in place, except for one wayward "T" that wants to tilt. That will be fixed before our September 13 Water Communion service.

We are eagerly awaiting delivery from a stone quarry in New Hampshire the granite for our new front walk. John Woolsey and Tim Hawley attended two meetings of the Petersham Historic District Commission to be sure the design and the materials are true to the historic site. As soon as the walkway is laid, a handrail will be installed from West Street up to the front steps. We hope to complete this project before regular services resume on September 13.



Computer rendering of planned granite walkway and iron hand rail.

Keeping water out of the dining room is being addressed by several projects. Starting with what can be done right away, John Woolsey and Tim Hawley acted on Robin Koenig's suggestion to install a berm along West Street to keep water from running down the walk and on to the steps leading to the kitchen. The five-inch rain on July 28 revealed that the berm is working and should be extended. The second step was hiring a sexton, and we now have Lisa Ahlstrom on board to check the church for water penetration and check the sump pumps during and after major rains. Lisa is also sealing gaps between some of the stones where water may be entering. A larger project to deflect rain water away from the foundation is currently in the design phase.

We recently had a new visitor at church, a pileated woodpecker. We love the song and plumage of these beautiful birds and we would love them even more if they refrained from chopping holes in the woodwork of the church. In addition to keeping water out of the building, we now have the challenge of keeping wildlife out, too.

The Parish Committee authorized an "energy audit" of the church and Davis Memorial. There is no insulation in the sanctuary ceiling and heating the church is one of our biggest expenses. Interfaith Power and Light completed an inspection in July and will provide a report on ways we can reduce our energy costs. The MassSave program may have funding to offset some of the costs of insulation and weatherstripping. The report will also include no-cost recommendations, like fine-tuning our thermostat settings to optimize the heat where and when we need it.